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SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA MULLS NEW APPROACH TO PAKISTAN

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Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The French MFA, based on its perception of widespread international exasperation with Pakistan's failure to control the Taliban insurgency that operates within its borders, is considering a proposal to encourage NATO allies -- particularly the U.S. and the U.K. -- to push Pakistan toward better performance. In exchange, NATO could provide discrete technical training and financial support to Pakistan in developing a professional border patrol. In addition, individual donors, including France, could offer extensive funding for school construction and curriculum development, according to the French thinking. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Poloff met January 29 with Sonia Barbry, MFA desk officer for Pakistan. Barbry explained that the MFA was in the process of rethinking its approach to Pakistan following an "illuminating" meeting January 23 between Bruno Joubert, Deputy Secretary General of the MFA, and Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, General Secretary of the Pakistan Muslim League, a former political prisoner and a leading thinker on Pakistani foreign policy and intelligence. Hussain was in Paris at the invitation of the Center for International Study and Research (CERI), where he gave a speech entitled "Pakistan's Role in the Global War on Terror."

¶3. (C) According to Barbry, Hussain validated a growing conviction within the MFA that Pakistan's historical allies -- including the U.S. and the U.K. -- were becoming increasingly skeptical of the sincerity of Pakistan's stated commitment to fighting terrorism and insurgency. Barbry offered that the MFA shared with Hussain its perception that the U.S., infuriated by five years of empty promises to produce senior Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders, was "hardening its tone" toward Pakistan; Hussain had seconded that analysis. At the same time, she added, her understanding was that the USG was torn between increasing the pressure on Pakistan to produce tangible results in the form of controlled borders and captured insurgents and the concern that increased cooperation could place President Musharraf in an untenable position vis-a-vis powerful fundamentalists in his own government.

¶4. (C) According to Barbry, the MFA believes intelligence clearly points to ISI support for Taliban and Al Qaeda units operating out of Quetta, Peshawar and Waziristan province. However, the MFA lacks the intelligence to evaluate whether President Musharraf can or will not control his intelligence service's clandestine proxy wars across the

border with Afghanistan. Without a clear understanding of Musharraf's intentions, but with the conviction that he is probably a closer ally than anyone else this year's elections could produce, the MFA believes a new "carrot and stick" strategy might be warranted.

15. (C) In explaining the MFA's current thinking, Barbry was quick to acknowledge that France lacks the kind of diplomatic "leverage" in Pakistan that longstanding allies such as the U.S. possess, and that it would be ineffectual for France to approach Pakistan alone. For that reason, assuming the U.S. might be ready for a fresh perspective, the MFA is toying with the idea of approaching the U.S., the U.K. and other NATO allies to consider collaboration on a new program of pressure and incentives. Barbry said the MFA believes foreign aid is most critical in two areas: policing the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and developing a secular public school system that could draw students away from the madrassas.

16. (C) Barbry explained that, as an alternative to Pakistan's threats to mine its entire border with Afghanistan, the MFA was thinking in terms of encouraging NATO allies to help train and equip new Pakistani border patrol units. The units could police the border, and discriminate between Pashtun nomads and farmers that routinely and harmlessly wander across an arbitrary border and insurgents intent on violence. NATO soldiers or police trainers could remain discreetly present to ensure the Pakistani border guards in fact perform their duties, but not so visible that local publics would regard the border patrols as another instance of Musharraf bending to foreign militaries.

17. (C) In the field of education, Barbry said the MFA viewed the madrassas and the mindset they cultivate as one of the greatest long-term threats to security in South Asia. She expressed the MFA's admiration for the Fulbright program and

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USAID programs to build schools and develop secular curricula beginning at the elementary level. She added that the GoF hoped to increase its own modest investments in Pakistani education and to encourage other European countries to do the same.

18. (C) At the same time, Barbry argued, U.S. and European capitals needed to exert greater pressure on Musharraf to demonstrate his commitment to counterinsurgency and intelligence efforts -- not with words, but with tangible results. The MFA believed it was important to apply pressure decisively but quietly through diplomatic channels, so Musharraf can still credibly claim to his more fundamentalist supporters that he is not a puppet of the West.

19. (C) Barbry cautioned that the MFA's ongoing thinking did not yet constitute new MFA policy. While the MFA's Bureau of South Asia, in conjunction with Deputy Secretary General Joubert, is exploring ways that France can contribute more constructively to security in Pakistan and along the Afghan border, current thinking has yet to be blessed as policy by Political Director Gerard Araud.

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